

Mine Disaster Family Assistance Act of 2007

Putting Families First

We all agree that families who have lost loved ones in mining tragedies deserve our best efforts to provide consistent communication and support. The landmark MINER Act, signed into law last year, was a good first step in this direction, but, the concerns we continue to hear from families involved in recent mine tragedies like Crandall Canyon, Sago and Alma demand that we take additional steps to ensure that they receive the best information and care possible during an emergency.

Senator Murray has first-hand knowledge of the effectiveness of the National Safety Transportation Board (NTSB) model for family assistance. By creating a similar model for the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration, the Mine Disaster Family Assistance Act establishes the mechanism for the support these families deserve during an emergency.

Mine Disaster Family Assistance Act

Establishes a director of family support services at MSHA

- ☞ Serves as the federal government's point-of-contact for families during an emergency. The director is responsible for the overall coordination of family services provided by all parties involved in a mine emergency and ensuring families receive consistent information first during rescue and investigation efforts.
- ☞ MSHA remains the primary communicator to the mine operator, press and public, and bears primary federal responsibility for rescue and recovery operations.

Establishes a crisis care organization as the primary caregiver during emergencies

- ☞ Designates an independent nonprofit organization with experience in disasters and post trauma family communication, such as the American Red Cross (ARC), as the primary coordinator of emotional care and support for families. This organization will:
 - Provide mental health and counseling services to families, and a private place to grieve
 - Meet with family members onsite and contact those unable to travel to the accident site
 - Update families on accident and post accident activities
 - When appropriate, arrange a suitable memorial service in consultation with the families

Requires mine operators to submit a strategic plan to address the needs of families during an emergency

- ☞ Requires plans to be submitted within 6 months of enactment to MSHA for approval.
- ☞ Requires mine operators to clearly establish accident protocols before an emergency occurs.
- ☞ Prohibits approval of other operating plans until a mine has a MSHA-approved family assistance plan.

Prohibits unwanted solicitations

- ☞ Prevents unsolicited legal communication with the victims' families for 45 days after an accident.

Establishes a Mine Disaster Family Assistance Task force

- ☞ Gives families a voice in the process by including them as a required partner in a task force designed to provide recommendations for program enhancements. Other partners include mine operators (including operators of small mines), labor, the ARC, and the Bureau of Land Management.